

SUMMARY

Pacific Fishery Management Council Preferred Alternative Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat Final Environmental Impact Statement

Introduction

This document summarizes the Pacific Fishery Management Council's preferred alternative to be analyzed in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Designation and Minimization of Adverse Impacts Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The Council identified their preferred alternative on June 15, 2005, at the Council meeting in Foster City, California, based on analyses in the draft EIS and public comment. The following summary reflects the contents of written motions made by Council members, as modified through discussion and amendment, and voted on by the Council. The FEIS fully describing and analyzing this preferred alternative will be published by December 9, 2005. The Council will take follow-up action at the September and November meetings to adopt language amending the groundfish FMP, which will further specify the measures described here.

Identify and Describe Essential Fish Habitat

EFH is identified as all waters and sea bottom:

- in depths less than 3,500 m
- associated with seamounts in depths greater than 3,500 m
- in any areas designated as HAPCs not already identified by the above criteria

In addition, the 100% habitat suitability probability (HSP) area, all of which occurs in depths less than 3,500 m, constitutes a part of EFH, recognizing that the best scientific information demonstrates this area is particularly suitable groundfish habitat.

Figure 1 shows the extent of this EFH identification.

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) Designations

The following areas are designated HAPCs:

- Estuaries
- Canopy kelp
- Seagrass
- Rocky reefs

- The following areas of interest:
 - Off of Washington: All waters and sea bottom in state waters (0-3 nm).
 - Off of Oregon: Daisy Bank/Nelson Island, Thompson Seamount, President Jackson Seamount
 - Off of California: all seamounts, including Gumdrop Seamount, Pioneer Seamount, Guide Seamount, Taney Seamount, Davidson Seamount, and San Juan Seamount; Mendocino Ridge; Cordell Bank; Monterey Canyon; specific areas in the Federal Waters of the CINMS; specific areas of the Cowcod Conservation Area
- Thirteen surveyed oil production platforms off of California showing significant use by groundfish species, especially overfished species.

Figure 2 shows the location of these HAPCs.

The Council-preferred alternative also establishes a streamlined process for modifying existing or designating new HAPCs, based on proposals submitted to the Council. The process will allow organizations and individuals to petition the Council at any time to consider a new designation and ensures, provided they submit specified information, that the Council will consider their proposal.

Minimize Adverse Impacts to EFH

Prohibit the Expansion of Bottom Trawl Fishing

In order to prohibit expansion of bottom trawl fishing, all waters within the EEZ west of a line approximating the 700 fm depth contour are closed to fishing with bottom trawl gear.

Gear Restrictions to Protect Habitat

For waters within 0-200 miles offshore coastwide, the following gear restrictions will apply:

- Prohibit bottom trawl roller gear with a footrope diameter greater than 19 inches throughout the EEZ.
- Prohibit bottom trawl roller gear with a footrope diameter greater than eight inches eastward of a line approximating the 100 fathom depth contour. This would make the existing gear restriction, in place as a bycatch reduction measure, a permanent habitat protection measure.
- Prohibit dredge gear
- Prohibit beam trawl gear

Restrictions in state waters will be implemented by state law, as appropriate. Restrictions do not apply in internal waters (Puget Sound, San Francisco Bay, etc.), except as specified by state law.

Close Ecologically Important Areas to Specified Gear Types

In addition to the 700 fm closure (above), the Council-preferred alternative includes areas closed to specified gear types. These areas were developed through a collaborative process involving Oceana; groundfish trawl fishermen, organized by the Fishermen's Marketing Association; the Fisheries Heritage Group, bringing together harbor managers, the Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense, the Center for Future Oceans, and fisheries representatives; Council advisory bodies; and West Coast states.

Note: Figure 3 shows the location and extent of the 700 fm closure and the ecologically important areas described below. The accompanying table provides estimates of area (in square miles) covered by these closures. The names for these areas correspond to those used Figure 3; these areas by differ in location and extent from areas with the same name that were described in the DEIS and public comment materials.

Closed to bottom trawl gear off of Washington:

- Olympic 2
- Biogenic 1
- Biogenic 2
- Grays Canyon
- Biogenic 3

These closed areas do not apply to the Washington Coastal Treaty Tribes' Usual and Accustomed Fishery Grounds and Stations described at 50 CFR 660.324(c). NMFS and the four Washington Coastal Treaty Tribes will continue to work together to ensure protection of EFH and HAPCs. If further action is needed, NMFS will follow the procedures outlined at 50 CFR 660.324(d) and comply with any other applicable consultation requirements.

Closed to bottom trawl gear off of Oregon:

- Nahelem Bank/Shale Pile
- Astoria Canyon
- Siletz-deepwater
- Daisy Bank/Nelson Island
- Newport Rockpile/Stonewall Bank
- Heceta Bank
- Deepwater off Coos Bay
- Bandon High Spot
- Rogue Canyon

Closed to all bottom contact gear off of Oregon:

- Thompson Seamount
- President Jackson Seamount

Closed to bottom trawl gear off of California:

- Eel River Canyon
- Blunts Reef
- Mendocino Ridge
- Delgada Canyon
- Tolo Bank

- Point Arena Offshore
- Cordell Bank
- Biogenic Area 12
- Farallon Islands/Fanny Shoal
- Half Moon Bay
- Monterey Bay/Canyon
- Point Sur Deep
- TNC/ED Area 2
- TNC/ED Area 1
- TNC/ED Area 3
- Potato Bank (within Cowcod Conservation Area West)
- Cherry Bank (within Cowcod Conservation Area West)
- Hidden Reef/Kidney Bank (within Cowcod Conservation Area West)
- Catalina Island
- Cowcod Conservation Area East

Note: Scottish seine gear is exempted from these bottom trawl gear closed areas.

Closed to all bottom-contact gear off of California:

- Cordell Bank (within 50 fathom isobath, vertical hook-and-line allowed)
- Davidson Seamount Area

These closures will be described in a way that best meets the goals and objectives of the Cordell Bank and Monterey National Marine Sanctuaries, consistent with authorities granted under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and California state law.

Closed to fishing off of California, with exceptions as described:

- Specified areas within the federal waters portion of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS) as identified through the six-year multi-party collaborative effort between the state and stakeholders. All closed areas except for the western Anacapa Island closed area will be “no-take” areas. The western Anacapa Island area will be closed to specified gear types.

These closures will be described in a way that best meets the goals and objectives of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, consistent with authorities granted under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and California state law.

Effort Reduction

The Council-preferred alternative will incorporate a framework habitat protection measure into the groundfish FMP, which the Council may use in the future, promoting public-private partnerships to reduce fishing capacity in concert with other habitat protection measures. The description of these measures will be modeled after the efforts undertaken by The Nature Conservancy and Environmental Defense Fund in their central California coast project area. They have been pursuing the use of private

funds to purchase groundfish limited entry trawl licenses and vessels in concert with habitat protection measures, such as the central California coast bottom trawl closures that are part of network of closures described above.

Review of Mitigation Efforts

The Council will form a committee, which will meet periodically to:

- review specific areas included as HAPCs;
- review the scientific basis for any area closed to bottom trawl; and
- consider additional HAPCs or other protective measures.

If this committee determines that the best scientific information does not support continued closure of an area to bottom trawl fishing for habitat protection, it may, by majority vote, recommend the Council modify, move, or eliminate that area. The groundfish FMP will describe a framework process allowing boundary changes or elimination of habitat protection areas through federal rulemaking.

Research and Monitoring

Expanded Logbook Program

The Council will consider expansion of a logbook program to fishing vessels not maintaining logbooks, to record information on fishing time, location, and catch composition.

Expanded Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)

The Council will consider expansion of VMS to all bottom-trawl vessels as part of an ongoing Council action considering expansion of VMS beyond groundfish limited entry permit holders.

Promote Research Opportunities Using Habitat Protection Closed Areas

The Council will encourage new research on the effects of area closures on habitat recovery and the fishing industry. Habitat protection closures within current Rockfish Conservation Areas, which have been closed since 2003 for bycatch mitigation, provide excellent research opportunities to analyze the effect of the mitigation measures implemented as part of the Council-preferred alternative. Areas could be used to measure the length of time needed for habitat features and function to recover. Over time sites in closed areas could be compared with sites where fishing is ongoing in order to research the effects of fishing.

The Council will support the identification of sites within closed areas to help focus research efforts. By encouraging research at discrete sites, results can be more easily compared.

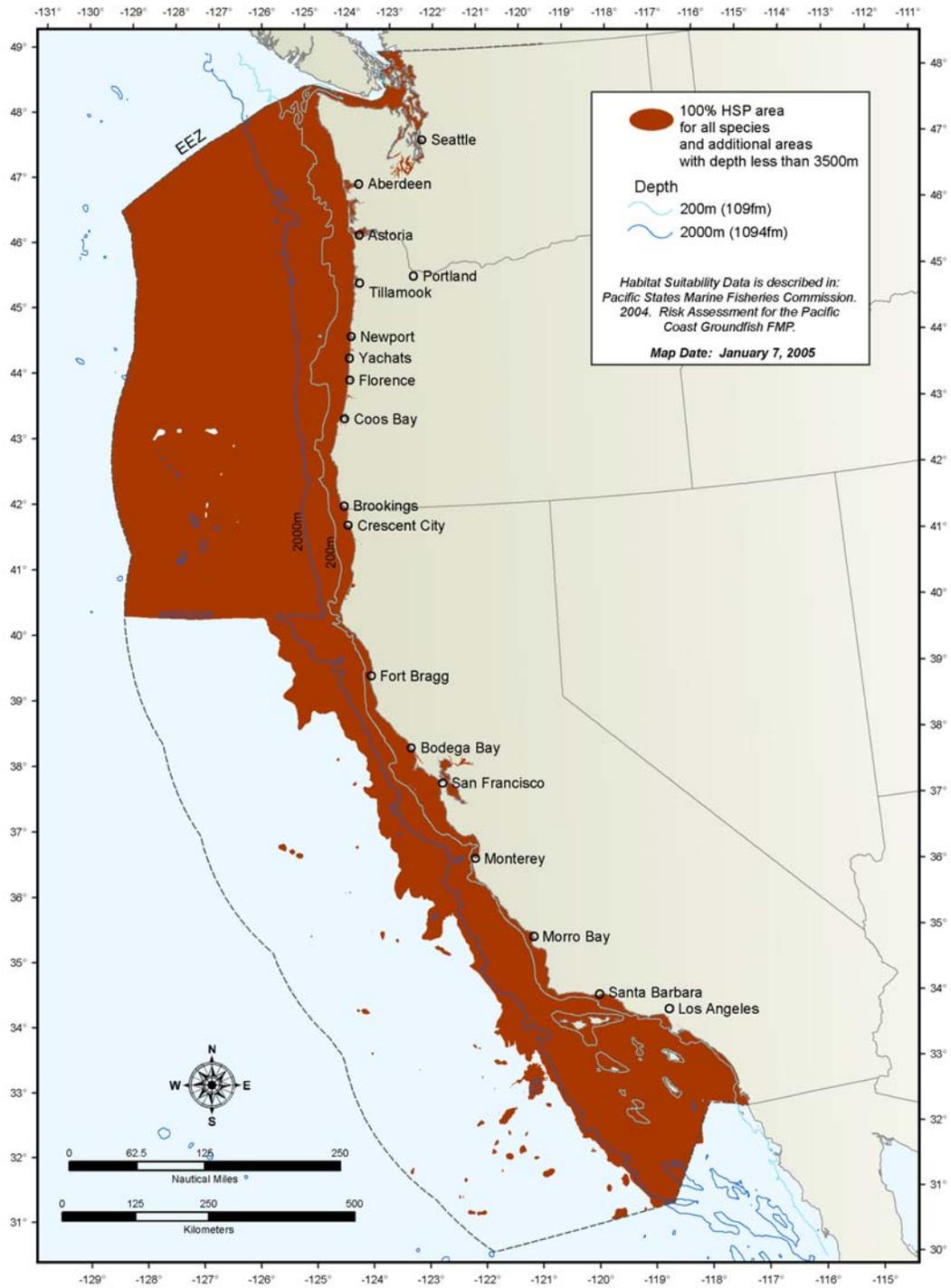


Figure 1: Preferred alternative for EFH identification and description.

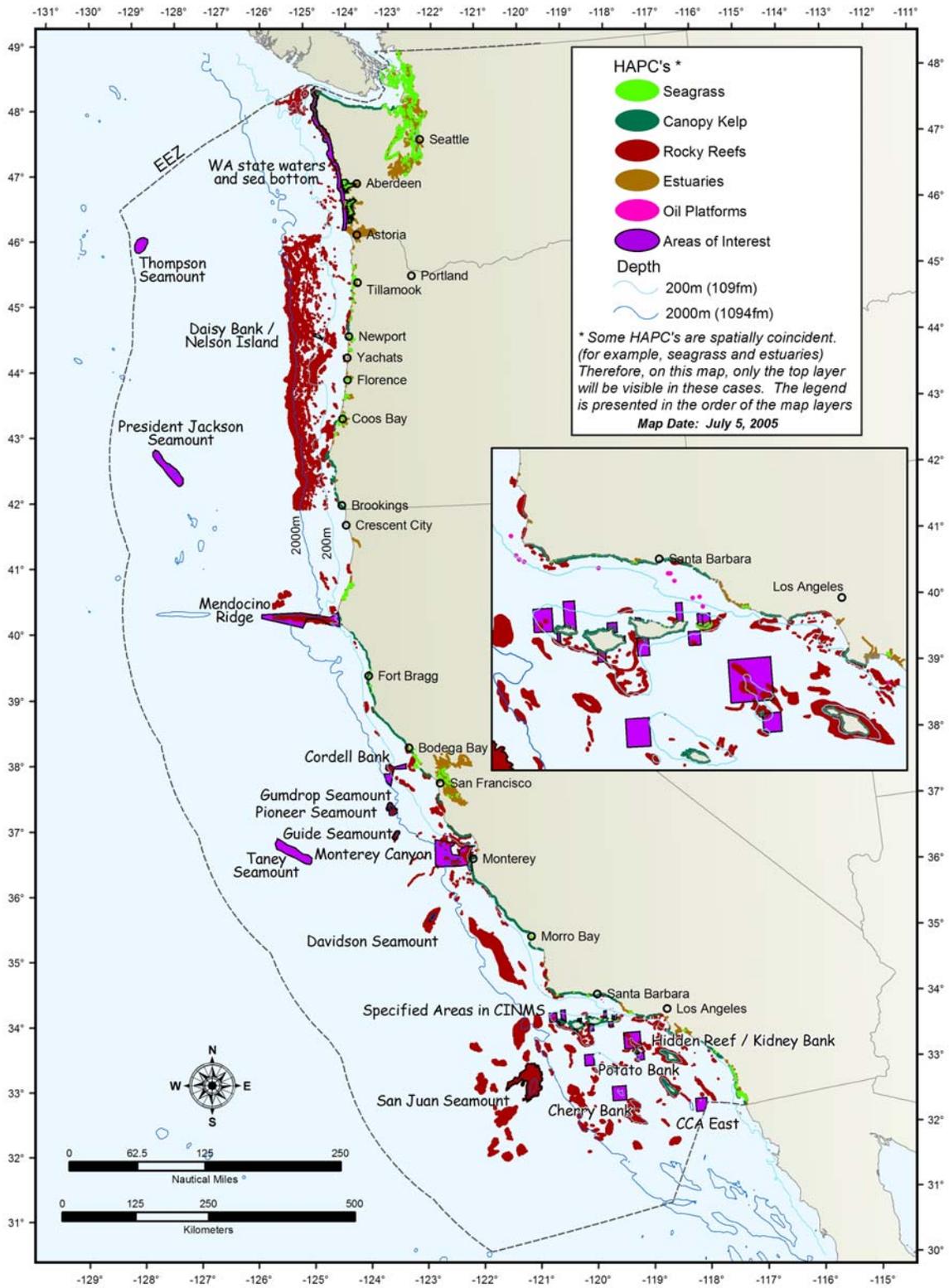


Figure 2: Preferred alternative HAPC designations.

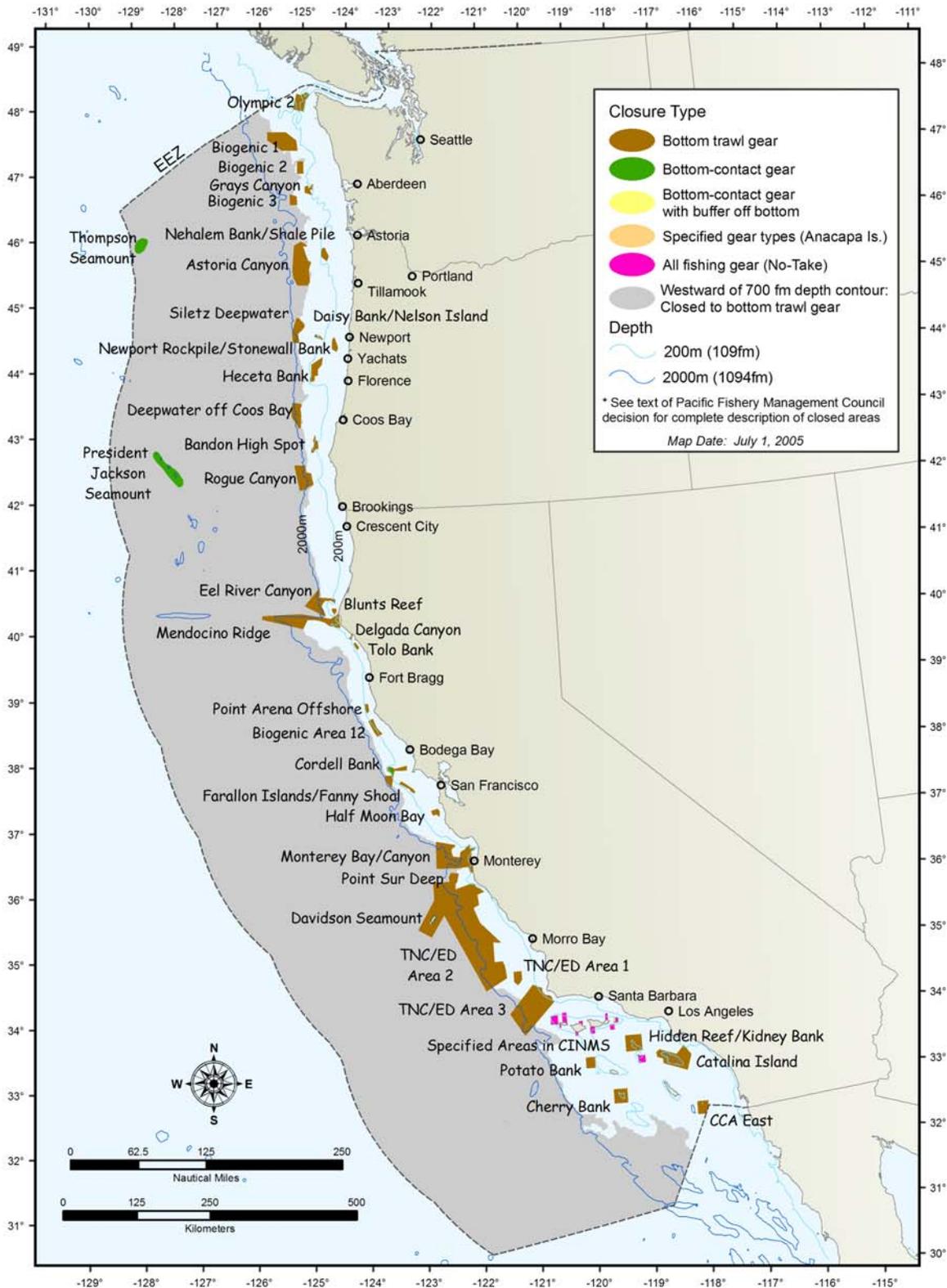


Figure 3: Preferred alternative trawl footprint and ecologically important area closures.

Estimated Area of Closures

Area Name	Area (sq mi)
Closed to bottom trawl west of a line approximating the 700 fathom isobath*	246,349.8
Closed to bottom trawl gear off of Washington	
Olympic_2	211.4
Biogenic_1	476.2
Biogenic_2	90.3
Grays Canyon	63.4
Biogenic_3	79.3
Subtotal	920.6
Closed to bottom trawl gear off of Oregon	
Nehalem Bank / Shale Pile	77.1
Astoria Canyon	684.7
Siletz Deepwater	207.7
Daisy Bank / Nelson Island	25.5
Newport Rockpile / Stonewall Bank	66.2
Heceta Bank	163.3
Deepwater off Coos Bay	218.0
Bandon High Spot	70.3
Rogue Canyon	341.7
Subtotal	1,854.4
Closed to all bottom contact gear off of Oregon	
Thompson Seamount	165.3
President Jackson Seamount	380.8
Subtotal	546.1
Closed to bottom trawl gear off of California	
Eel River Canyon	336.0
Blunts Reef	22.3
Mendocino Ridge	719.3
Delgada Canyon	16.0
Tolo Bank	21.3
Point Arena Offshore	34.0
Cordell Bank	148.7
Biogenic Area 12	99.2
Farallon Islands / Fanny Shoal	55.2
Half Moon Bay	49.6
Monterey Bay / Canyon	847.0
Point Sur Deep	84.4
TNC/ED Area 2	4,460.4
TNC/ED Area 1	105.2
TNC/ED Area 3	1,263.8

Area Name	Area (sq mi)
Potato Bank	110.7
Cherry Bank	217.1
Hidden Reef / Kidney Bank	297.9
Catalina Island	458.7
Cowcod Conservation Area East	147.7
Subtotal	9,494.5
Closed to all bottom contact gear of California	
Cordell Bank (within 50 fm isobath)	26.4
Davidson Seamount	15.1
Subtotal	41.5
Closed to fishing off of California, with exceptions (federal waters around the Channel Islands)	
Anacapa Island SMCA	9.6
Anacapa Island SMR	15.3
Carrington Point	12.7
Footprint	26.9
Gull Island	35.0
Harris Point	50.1
Judith Rock	4.6
Painted Cove	1.8
Richardson Rock	72.7
Santa Barbara	56.7
Scorpion	18.6
Skunk Point	1.4
South Point	14.9
Subtotal	320.4
TOTAL	259,527.4

*Area calculation based on 700 fm isobath. For the purposes of implementation this closure will be described by a series of lines between coordinates. The actual area of the closure based on this boundary will likely differ from the area computed from the isobath.

Note: Because some closed areas overlapped others, the following rules were used to prevent double-counting in the calculations: (1) A named ecologically important area has priority over the 700 fm bottom trawl footprint closure. Any overlapping areas between these areas are assigned to the ecologically important area. (2) An area with a higher protection status has priority over one with lower protection. There were two locations where this occurred: TNC/ED Area 2 / Davidson Seamount and Cordell Bank bottom trawl closure / Cordell Bank no bottom contact closure (within 50 fm). (3) If both areas have the same level of protection one was chosen arbitrarily for the purpose of assigning the area covered. This occurred in only one location, where Point Sur Deep and TNC/ED Area 2 overlapped. This overlapping area was assigned to TNC/ED Area 2